

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BLOCK GRANT

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities. Mandated by Congress, SAMHSA provides funding for substance abuse and mental health services through noncompetitive, formula block grants. Eligible entities must submit an annual application to demonstrate statutory and regulatory compliance in order to receive the formula-based funding.

SAMHSA is responsible for two block grant programs:

The Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) program provides funds and technical assistance to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, 6 Pacific jurisdictions, and 1 tribal entity. Grantees use the funds to plan, implement, and evaluate activities that prevent and treat substance abuse and promote public health.

The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) program provides funds and technical assistance to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 6 Pacific jurisdictions. Grantees use the funds to provide comprehensive, community-based mental health services to adults with serious mental illnesses and to children with serious emotional disturbances and to monitor progress in implementing a comprehensive, community-based mental health system.

What are the Purposes of a Block Grant?

Grantees use the block grant programs for prevention, treatment, recovery support, and other services to supplement Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance services. Specifically, block grant recipients use the awards for the following purposes:

- Fund priority treatment and support services for individuals without insurance or for whom coverage is terminated for short periods of time.
- Fund those priority treatment and support services that demonstrate success in improving outcomes and/or supporting recovery that are not covered by Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance.
- Fund primary prevention by providing universal, selective, and indicated prevention activities and services for persons not identified as needing treatment.
- Collect performance and outcome data to determine the ongoing effectiveness of behavioral health promotion, treatment, and recovery support services.

The MHBG program's objective is to support the grantees in carrying out plans for providing comprehensive community mental health services. The MHBG program is authorized by section 1911 of Title XIX, Part B, Subpart I and III of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act.

SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services' (CMHS) Division of State and Community Systems Development (DSCSD) administers MHBG funds. Grantees can be flexible in the use of funds for both new and unique programs or to supplement their current activities.

In addition to providing MHBG awards, CMHS provides recipients with technical assistance (TA) to support the use of evidence-based programs.

The MHBG program targets two specific populations:

- **Adults with serious mental illnesses.** This includes persons age 18 and older who have a diagnosable behavioral, mental, or emotional condition (as defined by the Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders) that substantially interferes with, or limits, one or more major life activities, such as:
 - Basic daily living (for example, eating or dressing)
 - Instrumental living (for example, taking prescribed medications or getting around the community)
 - Participating in a family, school, or workplace
- **Children with serious emotional disturbances.** This includes persons up to age 18 who have a diagnosable behavioral, mental, or emotional condition (as defined by the DSM) that results in a functional impairment that substantially interferes with, or limits, a child's role or functioning in family, school, or community activities.

Performance Requirements: Each grantee has a designated unit of the executive branch that is responsible for administering the MHBG. In Iowa, it is the Division of Mental Health and Disability Services within the Iowa Department of Human Services. SAMHSA expects block grant recipients to satisfy the following performance requirements:

- They must submit a plan explaining how they will use MHBG funds to provide comprehensive, community mental health services to adults with serious mental illnesses and children with serious emotional disturbances. SAMHSA also requires recipients to provide annual reports on their plans.
- They may distribute funds to local government entities and non-governmental organizations.
- They must ensure that community mental health centers provide such services as screening, outpatient treatment, emergency mental health services, and day treatment programs.
- They must comply with general federal requirements for managing grants. They must also cooperate in efforts by SAMHSA to monitor use of MHBG funds. For example, each year, CMHS conducts investigations (site visits) of at least ten grantees receiving MHBG funds. (Iowa had a SAMHSA site visit in September of 2013.) The purpose of the site visit is to assess how they are using the funds to benefit the population. These evaluations include careful review of the following:
 - How the grantees are tracking use of MHBG funds and their adult and child mental health programs
 - Data and performance management systems
 - Collaboration with consumers and the grantees' mental health planning council
- Grantees receiving MHBG funds are required to form and support a state or territory mental health planning council.

The Role of the Mental Health Planning Council: A mental health planning council is required as a condition for receiving Federal mental health block grant funds. The Council is to ensure collaboration among key state agencies and facilitate consumer input into the state's mental health services and activities. The majority (51% or more) of a state's planning council should be comprised of consumer and family members. To ensure coordination among state agencies in mental health planning, the planning council is required to:

- Include representatives from state education, mental health, rehabilitation, criminal justice, housing, and social services agencies
- Include adult members with lived experience who receive (or have received) mental health services
- Include family members of children with emotional disturbances

The purpose of the planning councils in each State and Territory is to meaningfully involve concerned citizens in planning and evaluating the mental health service delivery in their states. Defined by Federal law, these councils:

- Review community mental health block grant plans and make recommendations to the State administration.
- Monitor, review and evaluate all mental health services throughout the State or Territory.
- Serve as advocates for adults with serious mental illnesses, children with severe emotional disturbances, and others with mental health needs.